IN SENATE

OF THE UNITED STATES.

JANUARY 28, 1806.

MR. MITCHILL, from the committee to whom was referred, the memorial of the merchants of New York, submitted a report on that part of the same, which relates to "the defenceless situation of the port of New York."

EARLY in the history of North America, the harbor of New York was discovered by the Dutch to be a convenient place of resort for ships. Subsequent experience has proved the judgment of the Hollanders to have been good. The place where the North river forms a junction with Long Island sound, is as well if not better adapted to navigation and trade than any which the Atlantic coast affords.

The city at the head of the harbor, is about 27 miles from the ocean, the ebb and flow of the tide is about 6 feet. The saltness of the water is not much inferior to that of the neighboring sea.

The harbor is a bay or bason, surrounded chiefly by islands. Though the space

from the foot of the Neversunk hills, to the mouth of the river Ranban, and another space from Bergen point, to Hobocken are points of the main land, which skirt the shores between the insular positions. The land is mostly low and is composed principally of gravel, sand, and loom; and in certain spots strata of solid granite appear.

The island of *Sandy Hook*, where the light house stands, is little more than a beak rising not far above the level of spring tides. *Staten island* swells into moderate hills, and and presents especially on its eastern side several bold elevations. *Long island* whose western extremity loses its ridges and hills in the plains of *Flatlands* and *Newertrecht*, still retains at the *narrows* where its cliffs are somewhat abrupt and prominent, several positions of considerable strength. In these shores of the two last mentioned islands, the army of the enemy was landed in 1776, and a repetition of such an invasion might be discouraged by the erection of suitable works to oppose it. *Governor's island* has already been much improved by military works and is the spot on which fort Gay and the principal other fortifications have been erected. *Bedlow island*, though very small, has also been considered proper for defensive operations, and in some degree prepared to annoy an enemy. On *Manhattan island*, where the city of New York stands, there was once a fort and battery. These have been demolished of late years, under a conviction

of their unfitness, as have likewise some more recent breastworks and parapets, which though constructed but 8 or 9 years ago, were within a twelvemonth, destroyed by the people who made them.

Between these islands there are deep channels and rapid currents. Ships of large force may be brought in from sea and anchored in safety abreast of the town. And having once reached that station, there is water enough to convey frigates or even larger ships, quite to the city of Hudson.

To the saltness, depth, and swiftness of the current, is to be ascribed the openness of the harbor of New York during the winter. In 1780, its surface was covered by a thick and strong covering of ice. The like has never happened since, not even during the rigorous winter of 1805. And it is remarkable that while the Delaware, Patapsco, and Patomac are frozen, and Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Alexandria are secured thereby from the fleets of an invader, the bay of New York, though situated further to the northward, possesses commonly no such protection, but is accessible from the ocean with but trifling impediment.

The insecurity of the city is evinced by other facts. With a small squadron of ships in 1674, the English took it from the Dutch. Shortly afterwards it was retaken with almost equal ease. No cause of attack occurring until the commencement of the revolutionary war, it was found utterly incapable of defence

against a hostile fleet and army in 1776, and abandoned to the enemy by the troops arrayed for its protection. And that very foe, which then gained the possession, held it as a garrison until 1783, when on its evacuation, the inhabitants were enabled to return to their homes, after an exile of 7 long years.

Since the revolution, New York has greatly increased in population, extent, capital and enterprise. The memorialists state that *there* one third of the national revenue is collected. They hope so important a sea port may be thought worthy of an efficient defence. And they beg that a portion of the public treasure accumulated in that place may be expended in rendering, both that treasure and the city in which it is kept, more secure.

For the further information of the Senate, the committee beg leave to observe, that a piece of land has been already purchased by the state, on Staten island, comprehending the high point on which the signal poles of the merchants are erected. The greater part of Governor's island is understood to be the property of the state, a small part of it only having been purchased by the nation. On these parcels of ground the labor of constructing works is the principal matter of expense. And it is in this posture of affairs that the memorialists, after the state has done so much, ask the nation to bear a proportional part of the charge, necessary to provide more formidable means of defence and offence.

Extravagant estimates have been made by certain jobbers and projectors. Artificial islands, and immense piers, and enormous floating batteries, and vast chevaux de frises, have been talked of; enough to absorb the whole revenue, and to terrify all sober calculators of the cost. The committee have dismissed those schemes, as favoring rather of the visionary and magnificent, than of the useful and feasible. They content themselves with recommending an appropriation to a moderate amount, for making further military improvements on the sites already purchased, and which the state may hereafter purchase and surrender; in full confidence at the same time, that a due proportion of the heavy artillery, armed ships, and gun boats of the nation, will be stationed at the harbor of New York.

Under these impressions, the following proposition is submitted:

Resolved, That it is expedient to appropriate the sum of dollars, to be laid out in such manner, and under such direction as Congress shall judge proper, in fortifying the harbor and city of New York.

The committee have deemed it to be within the limits assigned them, to recommend another proposition, in favor of the capital of South Carolina:

Resolved, That it is expedient to appropriate the sum of dollars, to be laid out in such manner, and under such regulations as Congress shall judge proper, in for-

tifying the port of Charleston in South Carolina.

And for the purpose of providing for other defenceless places, if any such there be, the committee submit another proposition:

Resolved, That it is expedient to appropriate the sum of dollars, to be laid out in fortifying such ports and harbors, other than New York and Charleston, as the President of the United States shall think most conducive to the public security.

Committee Room, Jan. 27, 1806.

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